LBL 19 BK3

Three Sisters

p. 8

To Miss Sarah Leigh

with B. Bailey's

best affectionate Regards.

Inscription

For four saplings of oak which were transplanted from Hanford wood into the garden of Mrs Leigh of Slade on Wednesday the 27 day of July 1814.

—

Sacred to Friendship

—

Celestial Happiness! whenceer she stoops
To visit Earth, one shrine the Goddess finds,
And one alone — the bosom of a friend;
Where heart meets heart, reciprocally soft,
Each other's pillow to repose divine.

Young.

—

It is unnecessary to remind the persons, who are alluded to in the following lines, that the occasion, on which they are written, is the commemoration of supremely happy days spent in the rational enjoyment of the sublime beauties of nature. It will ~~have~~ also, I trust, to awaken and keep alive the active energies of a friendship which was formed on the firm basis of pure and virtuous affection. As I did not compose this poem from any wish to display a talent for writing, I shall waste no time in fruitless apology for its execution. The lines bear evident marks of the haste in which they were written, and I know they are rough and unpolished; they are the rugged yet the pure ore of affection and friendship. I wish they had been better; but I should place no reliance upon them were their composition ever so perfect, did they not, as I know they do, flow from the unaffected sincerity of my heart. I therefore confidently expose myself to the known candour and generosity of those dear friends that inspired them. -

Sept 1814

113 - Lines marked with pencil are now - 80

Inscription.

—

Shepherd, amidst thine here obtain
Pleasure unalloyed with pain,
Joy, that suits the social sphere!
Gentle Shepherd, lend an ear.

Learn to relish calm delight,
Verdant vales and fountains bright,
Trees that nod on sloping hills,
Caves that echo, tinkling rills.

Inscription in Shenstone's Leasowes.

—

× There is a lonely and sequestered spot,
Where nature strives even — to shield herself; —

—

* I hardly need remind my kind readers that I am here attempting to describe Harford Wood. I have rushed, upwardly to the route of the Roman Poet, "into the midst of things". I have crossed through the wood, and instantly ascended the hill at the back of it. From whence I have descended, and reentered at the gate that leads into the path which winds on by the side of the hedge until it brings you to the Cottage. Here I have concentrated my whole recollections of the beauties of the wood, and as far as my powers would allow I have attempted to depict them. —

A cord – whose bosom from the neighbouring hill,
Like the green sea just ruffled, seems to woo
A murmuring kiss from every breeze – and by
Just like a wild bird flutters 'mid the trees,
Whose clustering branches brighten, and the boughs
With instantaneous ecstasy unwind wide
Their outspread arms o'er-arching, and admit
The insinuating whisper of the air.
Where dallying Sunbeams love awhile to lie,
And glitter on the leaves, whose verdant breasts
They silver o'er with gladness, till a cloud
Its evening shadow spreads across the sun,
And frowns upon the wood with darkening brow.

Embosomed in the centre of a wood
A peasant's cot rears up its humble head,
Where laughing Nature hurries on the hours
And bears away the soul upon her wings.
The sweetest fragrance loads the woodland air;
The gadding honeysuckle rambles on,
And peeps from out the Thorn; and the wild Rose
† With ruddy blushing cheeks, but at Eve
In pensive sadness eyes the setting Sun

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† Shenstone chuses this poetical picture to describe the two sorts of Roses, the pink and the white, which beautifully variegate the hedges in Staffordshire.

Even as the primrose white, which shrinks to hide
among the modest violets its cheek
of maiden Coyness (Covely); while the ivy clasps
its parent stem in folds of brightest green,
and cunningly creeps up, and only stays
Beneath its shaggy brow that seems to nod
majestical Approval of its love:
Thus does a fondling child look up and smile
With sweetest love into its parents face

next gaze on wildest knolls, whose tops are crowned
with mountain ash and lofty elms and beech;
While deep beneath is scooped the darkening dell
Close set with branching trees of every kind,
and with the nobly spreading oak entrenched,
And thickening briars and the sweet white Thorn,
And myrtle smiling peace upon the Scene.

Hear babbling brooks that o'er their pebbly beds,
Like Courtiers common at their shining Lot,
And restless woo as vain kind Nature's Morsel;*
The cheerful birds that sing on every spray,
And tell their wild notes to the Evening breeze;
The rustling music of the clashing leaves,
Jammed into harmony by Zephyr's wings:

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* Sleep, gentle Sleep. 'Nature's soft nurse'
Henry 4-

And when these sounds sink in the sleeping air,
And Nature rests to gaze upon the heaven,
The sounds her beamy hesperuses of light
To crown this lonely and sequestered spot,
* The nightingale pours forth her mellow notes,
And lulls the listening heaven itself to rest.
Here Nature proudly tells the captured Soul
That God on Earth can make a paradise.

One Evening when behind the western hill
The Sun had sunk into his golden couch,
And while the Cloud that formed his latest veil
Hung like a steaming furnace in the heaven,—
And one the living lamps of yellow light,
Which—(as from Earth the Evening mist upholes)
Arose from his last rays, and o'er the Sky
Poured forth its golden and diffusive stream,—

---

* In order to complete the scene I have been allowed into an error, as Shirrick Sam informed that there are none or very few Nightingales in Devonshire. It is strange; and such Evening scenes as Hartford Bridge and others in this delightful County want only this "sweet bird, most musical, most melancholy" to lift the mind into an imaginary Paradise.

A Band of friends who owned affection's laws,
And Love as warm and pure as owns the light.
That blushed at the departure of the sun
In friendship's bond had joined their feeling hearts —
Were walking with their own and Nature's God —
Their Souls on fire at what their sight was gave —
The glowing beauties of the western heaven,
And this beloved paradise on earth,
To which they owe and oft did make resort.
× To which their souls in Ramsey's glittering steam, (perch) (angel wings)
× And soar in Godlike ecstasy and thirst.

× This Sunset, which I have now introduced and — faintly attempted to describe, I beheld from the — sublime Cliffs at Bransomt. Saxon can depict the scene, nor the varied feelings with which my soul was enraptured. I felt what I have since read in a recently published poem:

So rich a cup of wine, in such bright hour
Of visitation from the living God,
Thought was not, in Enjoyment it expired.
Wordsworth

Thought I am not able to describe it, I never can forget it —

Three Sisters, one the loveliest of the Fay,
Their Cousin of a sisterhood of soul,
And two fair friends, as brothers knit to each,
Composed this circle of the dearest friends.

Oh! for the pen of Milton to describe
The female virtue and the loveliness,
That streamed in softness o'er the tender leaves
Of these fair plants that brightened all the wreath,
And added beauty to the heavenly scene.

Thee first, dear Mary, thee with I address,
In whose Society the happy hours
On silken wings of light have flown away —
Light to my mind and softness to my heart:
Thy friendship for me is a pearly gem,
That sparkles in my breast, as Love's warm rays
Peer through it, — as through dew-drops doth the Sun:
Thy thoughts are deep; and Fancy fries thy soul,
And Sensibility enwraps thy heart!

And Thou, "-Zuleika — child of Generosity!" ×
Art like the Moon that sails along the Sky
without a cloud to darken o'er its phase,

× ~~Miss~~ Lord Byron's Bride of Abydos.

Or interrupt its course: — Thus is thy soul
Exempt from clouds of temper, — "that o'er shade —
Distort — and mar the face of beauty: — Yes!
Thy mind is tasteful delicate and clear;
Thy heart is tenderness and gentle love!

Sweet Lilia! Thou art graven on my heart,
— and Memory's eye with ecstasy inverts
Its vision inward to behold thy form,
Whose light and lovely as the Gossamer,
Flits o'er my mind, and brightens in the rays
Of glowing Fancy: — and I see thy soul
Now rising in radiant lightning from thine eyes,
And caught in purest ecstasy of bliss:
Yet tender Pity nestles in thy breast,
— And sheds the dew of feeling o'er thy heart:
Thy smile is heavenly innocence; — and pain,
Which others bear, stands mirrored in thine eye —.
The crystal fount whence Sympathy is shed:
Thy Soul's as pure as is the morning beam,
That visits thy fair face, — and soft as that,
Which fans to rest, breathes as the setting Sun
Thy golden hair steeps in the yellow tide!

× Cowper —

For, dear Maria, shall thy blessed name
Pass unregarded by my grateful Muse!
She plumes her pinions with thy pious love, –
Thy tenderness of heart, that watches o'er
Thy mother's bed in sickness; – and thy tears
Stand all recorded on the angel's roll!

And shall thy faithful Phila e'er forget
Thee, my most generous friend, my dearest James?
Our hearts are One – by love and virtue joined;
Dear James Life's stormy current we'll together glide,
And rest our hopes in heaven that both our souls
May dip their kindred pinions in the wave,
That in Eternity unceasing flows!

× How humanly loves to dwell on that last Eve
I spent with these dear friends in this wood:
The saplings which were planted by the hand –
The hand so fair – so pure – that but her look
Can bear it tinsley – from this sweet wood
Were drawn by Phila – and are friendship's pledge, –
With thine, Maria, growing by their side, –
Together stand a pledge of Love to all!!!

× The last time we were all together at Harford Wood, the saplings were scrimped away. Two of them, which were drawn up by the author, were planted by Miss Jamsine Leigh; the other two by Miss Maria Pearce.

Oh Earth! regard them as thy sacred charge,
And smile, oh Heaven propitious on their growth!
Let no contagious blast rend up their roots;
Nor let the blustering winds expend their rage
On these resistless emblems of our love:
But, softest Zephyrs! flutter round your flight,
And fan and cool them with your airy wings,
× That Drought shrink not their veins — nor nipping Blight
With pestilential breath sweep off their leaves:
Let thy life-breathing beams around them play,
Oh Sun! and kindly visit them with warmth;
And as the Spring unfolds their tender leaves,
Infants
Each bud shall, like a Baby's outspread hand,
Bespeak its silent gratitude, — and tell
That every leaf is Thankfulness and Love!

× The measure of this line is incorrect without
this Epithet which is not in the first Copies —

Supplementary Lines to "The Inscription"
On the approach of Winter

See Winter comes to rule the varied year,
Sullen and sad, with all his rising train,
Vapours, and clouds, and storms!

Thomson

Now, lovely Nature! o'er thy fading face
Approaching Winter flaps his eagle-wing,
Waving with reckless winds, and storms, and darkness!
The flowers, — with which Spring carpets thy fair fields,
And fans with balmy sweetness of her breeze; —
Thy roses, — blushing with the kiss of Summer; —
Thy honey-suckles, — that with fondness twine
Around the thorn, and breathe along the air
Their rich perfume — to heaven a sweet thanksgiving! —
Thy Jessamine that pours the bowered shade,
Whose downy flower even with the lily vies
In whiteness — sweetly scented as the rose; —
The leaves, — which Summer opens to the ray
Of the warm sun that gave them birth in Spring,
Which Autumn's breath doth sear and yellow o'er, ×
(As the last — soft — lingering beam of her mild Sun
Tinges the Evening sky; — All these hath Winter
With his fierce talons seized on as his prey!

× my way of life
Is fallen into the sear and yellow leaf.

Macbeth

The timid flowers have died within his grasp;
The shrunken leaves have withered at his touch,
and fallen upon the earth — as sallow hue
Is by disease spread o'er Health's ruddy cheek —
As golden hair falls o'er the fair breast,
And hides its loveliness; — the naked trees
Imploringly sketch forth their disrobed arms;
The tender saplings — blossoms of our love! —
Shorn of their leaves, display their slender stems;
Their birth-place too is robbed of all its charms, —
Your lovely band, — wherein our happy band
Have whiled away the feathered hours of Joy,
Whose light wings glistened with the sparkling dew
of Love and admiration — (For thy charms,
O! Nature! sweetly visited our hearts —);
The newly opened buds of Friendship's vows
Waved gay and wanton, as the Summer leaves;
To each soft breeze that sighed: — But oh! my Friends!
Their winter is not come; — Their leaves still cleave
With firmest fondness to the Tree of Life!
And when the wintry blast of Death lays bare
Its shattered trunk, Decay will have no power
To plunge our Souls in Lethe's cold — black Stream:
Friendship may strew its leaves upon the Earth, —
Our bodies sink beneath the winter — storm
of Death; — But oh! my dear, dear friends!
Our blessed Souls will freshen in the Spring
of future Life — Eternity — and Love!!!

London Nov.r 14 — 1814